

Lame-duck San Antonio Mayor Falls Short on Affordable Housing

by Kayla Miranda

Outgoing Mayor Ron Nirenberg has failed on the local housing front. That much is clear from his recent support for a downtown minor league stadium plan that will demolish 381 units of naturally affordable housing. However, his ineffectiveness in the affordable housing arena goes far beyond that one vote as illustrated by numerous missteps since.

Front and center has been Nirenberg's inability or unwillingness to make meaningful progress with *Opportunity Home S.A.*—the largest housing authority in Texas. *Opportunity Home* is an asset to our community because it ensures families pay no more than a third of their income on rent. Instead, the Mayor stood on the sidelines when the *Opportunity Home* board, which are all mayoral appointees, abruptly terminated former *Opportunity Home* CEO, Ed Hinojosa, this past June.

Hinojosa was widely supported by the community for his progress towards reorienting the organization and securing millions of additional local and federal dollars for public housing. While the current mayor stands idly by, the replacement CEO for *Opportunity Home* is dead-set on eliminating public housing units—even going so far as to return over \$8 million in housing bonds Hinojosa secured for the redevelopment of *Alazan-Apache* back to the city.

Far too often, there is a new headline describing how the waitlist for *Opportunity Home* continues to trend in the wrong direction with its housing waitlist growing from 50,000 people to 65,920 since 2017 when Nirenberg took office. However, when the Missions baseball stadium deal hit a housing snag this fall, and in the midst of their so-called financial crisis, *Opportunity Home* magically appeared with hundreds of vouchers that could have gone to families who have been waiting for years. What a crock!

The *Strategic Housing Implementation Plan (SHIP)* is the City's affordable housing guidepost. While there are numerous goals and solutions, the primary focus of the plan is to build nearly 13,592 units for families at or under the 30% of the *Area*



The 2025 San Antonio mayoral election will be held on May 3, 2025, to elect the next mayor of San Antonio, Texas. The election will be officially nonpartisan under state law and will determine the successor of four-term mayor Ron Nirenberg, who is ineligible for re-election due to term-limits.

Median Income (AMI) threshold. Yet, three years into the plan, we are only about 10% towards the total goal.

During his tenure, the heavy reliance on housing tax credit deals has put our city in a precarious position. Housing tax credit deals require multiple, multiple layers of capital/financing, which makes it difficult to build the

deeply affordable units San Antonians need. Lenders must mitigate risk, as well as ensure there is a return on investment. This furthers the idea that housing is a commodity and not a necessity.

To make matters worse, there are more than 3,500 units with affordability covenants that will expire between now and 2029. Developers agree to affordability covenants, which keep rents affordable for a given period of time, in exchange for tax credits or other government housing incentives. Nirenberg, instead of working swiftly to extend the affordability covenants at these properties, has not mentioned this issue nor presented a plan to preserve affordability for these units.

The fallout from Nirenberg's bad housing policy will continue to reverberate around San Antonio. For example, the baseball stadium development team is in discussions to acquire other affordable housing sites near the stadium. Other consequences are more visible, such as the Point in Time data that shows that homelessness increased by 23% from 2017 to 2024.

Ron Nirenberg's track record as mayor reveals a troubling pattern of inaction and misplaced priorities in addressing San Antonio's pressing affordable housing crisis. His recent support for projects that compromise existing affordable units, coupled with his failure to effectively lead *Opportunity Home S.A.*, highlights a significant gap in his ability to advocate for San Antonio families. It is crucial to recognize that true leadership in housing requires not just ambition, but a steadfast commitment to preserving and expanding affordable housing for all.

Bio: Kayla Miranda, a housing justice advocate organizing in the Westside of San Antonio, resides at the Alazan/Apache Courts with her family.